**UNITED NATIONS** **S**

**Security Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1998/517
16 June 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 16 JUNE 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

The Iraqi Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, recently wrote to you about the use of depleted uranium (DU)-based ammunition by United Kingdom forces during the 1990/1991 Gulf conflict and the alleged impact on the Iraqi people (S/1998/430). His claims are baseless.

A new 120-mm tank round with a DU core was indeed fired by United Kingdom forces' Challenger 1 tanks in coalition operations to liberate Kuwait in 1991. This ammunition has a unique capability as a kinetic penetrator against modern main battle tank armour. However, this must be seen in its proper context. The British Government's assessment is that United Kingdom tanks fired fewer than 100 DU rounds against Iraqi military forces during hostilities, although additional rounds were fired during earlier work-up training in Saudi Arabia. The United Kingdom armoured forces also operated at a considerable distance from the centres of population in southern Iraq such as Basra, Az-Zubayr and Umm Qasr; after crossing the Saudi Arabian/Iraqi border north of Hafr al Batin, these forces turned east, entered Kuwait and pushed towards Kuwait City.

Mr. Al-Sahaf's letter implies that Her Majesty's Government has only recently admitted to using DU ammunition during the Gulf war. This is not the case. We publicly acknowledged the use of DU-based tank ammunition (rather than missiles) as early as March 1991. This fact is also mentioned in the letter of 6 December 1994 to Sir David Steel from Malcolm Rifkind, the then United Kingdom Secretary of State for Defence, to which Mr. Al-Sahaf's letter refers.

According to Mr. Al-Sahaf, Mr. Rifkind's letter stated that DU rounds "discharge a highly toxic material, which constitutes a health threat". This is not correct. The letter explained that DU rounds can produce "a small amount of radioactive and toxic particulate material when they impact with a hard surface" which "could in the short term form a health risk if inhaled or ingested, although it is unlikely that anyone other than those in the target area would be exposed to large enough quantities of the material for their health to be at risk". This remains our view.

Mr. Al-Sahaf also attributes an increase in ill-health in Iraq, including cancers, to the use of DU ammunition. Her Majesty's Government has seen no

epidemiological research data on the Iraqi population and therefore cannot comment on whether there is an unusually high incidence of ill-health in southern Iraq. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the illnesses of the types listed in Mr. Al-Sahaf's letter are uniquely associated with exposure to DU.

The use of DU rounds by United Kingdom forces was not in conflict with the Charter of the United Nations or any other international agreement and convention. In the use of these rounds and other weaponry, Her Majesty's Government complies strictly with international law.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) John WESTON
Permanent Representative of
the United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland
to the United Nations

---